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Theatre Critics' Reviews
1945

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1945 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres in Other Years
Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1944 Vol.

STAGE PLAY	PAGE
*Anna Lucasta	143
*Bell for Adano (A)	65
*Bloomer Girl	118
Catherine Was Great	154
Cherry Orchard (The)	276
Chicken Every Sunday	232
*Dear Ruth	56
Embezzled Heaven	97
*Follow the Girls	222
Hand in Glove	67
*Harvey	95
*I Remember Mama	111
Jacobowsky and the Colonel	243
Laffing Room Only	52
*Late George Apley (The)	77
Mexican Hayride	271
*On the Town	45
Perfect Marriage (The)	104
Sadie Thompson	84
School for Brides	156
Searching Wind (The)	217
Seven Lively Arts	62
Sing Out, Sweet Land	48
Snafu	106
Soldier's Wife	121
*Song of Norway	149
Sophie	50
Ten Little Indians	160
Trio	43

1943 Vol.

Carmen Jones	207
Kiss and Tell	356
*Oklahoma	341
One Touch of Venus	264
Two Mrs. Carrolls (The)	304
*Voice of the Turtle (The)	199

1940 Vol.

*Life With Father	457

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of October 15, 1945.*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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1945 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres During 1945
Reviews Appear in This Volume

STAGE PLAY	PAGE
Alice in Arms	278
And Be My Love	262
Blue Holiday	216
Boy Who Lived Twice (A)	177
Calico Wedding	259
*Carib Song	157
*Carousel	226
Common Ground	221
Concert-Varieties	200
*Dark of the Moon	252
*Deep Are the Roots	160
Deep Mrs. Sykes (The)	246
Devils Galore	174
Firebrand of Florence (The)	241
Foolish Notion	254
Foxhole in the Parlor	210
*Glass Menagerie (The)	234
Good Night Ladies	290
Goose for a Gander (A)	286
Happily Ever After	250
Hasty Heart (The)	298
Hollywood Pinafore	203
Hope for the Best	271
It's a Gift	257
Kiss Them for Me	244
Lady in Danger	240
Lady Says Yes (A)	294
Live Life Again	154
Make Yourself at Home	172
Many Happy Returns	296
*Marinka	186
Memphis Bound	207
Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston	180
Oh, Brother	195
One Man Show	269
Overtons (The)	274
Place of Our Own (A)	232
*Polonaise	149
Rebecca	288
Round Trip	213
*Ryan Girl (The)	168
Signature	264
Star Spangled Family	230
Stranger (The)	266
Tempest (The)	283
*Therese	146
Too Hot for Maneuvers	220
*Up in Central Park	280
Wind Is Ninety (The)	192
*You Touched Me	164

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of October 15, 1945.*

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THEATRE OPENINGS

"Therese"

"Polonaise"

Complete reviews appear in this issue

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS : : : 235 EAST 22ND STREET, NEW YORK 10, N. Y.

"Therese"

The Sun

OCTOBER 18, 1945

There Are Gruesome Moments in Spotty, Dawdling Melodrama, 'Therese.'

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The Broadway theater turned again last night to murder melodrama—turned to it in "Therese," a dawdling thriller that offers a few tense scenes and some acting of the ranting style that belonged to the old Bowery thrillers of Sullivan, Harris & Woods. Victor Payne-Jennings and Bernard Klawans present the new piece at the Biltmore.

"Therese" is cluttered with interminable interludes that contribute little to the story. It is burdened with several extraneous characters, sketchily drawn, that are no help to the play. And of the three players who are starred only Dame May Whitty comes through. A gallant trouper at 80, she gives a believable and eloquent characterization of an aging, puttering, anxious and devoted mother whose son is murdered on a river outing.

"Therese," played in varying adaptations in the theaters of many lands since 1872, is now presented as Thomas Job's dramatization of the Emil Zola novel, "Therese Raquin." Margaret Webster has given it painstaking direction, but she has also brought forth performances that frequently get out of control. I could have taken some quieter acting, along with some judicious cutting of minor roles.

The Biltmore's new play—the locale is the Pont Neuf district of Paris in 1875—tells a payment-deferred story of the increasing self-torture that comes upon a milliner's wife and her artist lover who have done the milliner in by drowning him. The revelation of their deed results in a paralytic stroke for the neurotic milliner's old mother, and she is thereafter a hopeless wheel-chair invalid, able to express herself only by the blazing hatred in her eyes. The play's big scene is reached at the close of the second and final act and it's quite a chiller, but it's been a long time in coming.

It's a play of no suspense, this "Therese." You wait for the inevitable crack-up of the artist who has taken the milliner's wife as his bride and who is forever haunted by the dead man's face. Victor Jory plays the role of Laurent violently. Eva LeGallienne, in a Lady Macbeth sort of part, is only partially successful and she also has moments of losing all restraint as the unhappy Therese. Dame May Whitty really gives a lesson in acting to everybody on the stage. There are two or three performances in minor roles that are downright bad. Raymond Sovey has done the setting and costumes; his design for the living room above the milliner's shop is excellent.

"Therese" of the school of "Payment Deferred" and "Night Must Fall," has some gruesome scenes but it is quite too spotty and too plodding for good melo drama. And it's my feeling that the characters, as written and played, with the exception of old Madame Raquin, are not very interesting people.

'THERESE.'

Play by Thomas Job, based on the Emile Zola novel, "Therese Raquin"; staging by Margaret Webster; setting designed by Raymond Sovey; presented by Victor Payne-Jennings and Bernard Klawans at the Biltmore Theater, Tuesday, October 9, 1945. The cast:

Camille	Berry Kroeger
Madame Raquin	Dame May Whitty
Therese	Eva LeGallienne
Laurent	Victor Jory
Madame Louise	Doris Patson
Mr. Grivet	John F. Hamilton
Inspector Michaud	Averell Harris
Suzanne	Annette Sorell

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 18, 1945

By Burton Rascoe

'Therese Raquin' a Splendid Achievement in Directing

In my book, "Therese," which opened at the Biltmore last night, goes down as another triumph for the incomparable Margaret Webster, who directed it. But I don't want to stop there. For here is a really first-class murder story, so beautifully and thrillingly presented that the audience last night seemed to hold its breath for two acts, lasting (with one intermission) for over two hours and then went wild with justifiable applause for the efforts of the players who had entertained them. I never saw an audience more quietly absorbed while a play was going on.

The theatrical season, so far, has not been any too hot. In fact, it has been extremely discouraging. "Therese" itself is frankly melodrama. Played by inexperienced actors, coached by an inexpert and insensitive director, it would be, I think, a pretty miserable flop. As it was presented at the Biltmore last night, it becomes an unforgettable experience in playgoing.

For, here is acting, on the part of eight players, which is just about tops in the art. There isn't a minor character who isn't merely good, but is very, very good. It is a great pleasure to see a show presented with such finish, such artistic truth and honesty and with know-how.

Good Play Craft.

While I am strewing compliments about, I mustn't neglect the author of the play, Thomas Job. He is an expert craftsman in the very difficult art of making melodrama as plausible and as real as a straight drama should be. Just how much he owes to the original stage version, which Emile Zola made from his novel, "Therese Raquin," first published in 1867, I wouldn't know, because I never read the play or the novel, "Therese Raquin" being so generally touted as Zola's masterpiece that, with cynical perversity, I have always declined to read it, although I have read most of Zola's other works.

Nor do I know how much Mr. Job owes to the John Stetson version of "Therese Raquin," which, Sam Zolotow tells me, was produced at the Union Square Theater in New York in 1892. But I have read enough Zola to know that Mr. Job must have done quite of re-creation to make the present play hold up so well as it does with a modern New York audience.

The play tells of how a woman provoked her lover to kill her husband in order that their liaison might no longer be a furtive and surreptitious affair and how, after the woman and her lover were married, their romance ended in the torments of their consciences until they both confessed the crime and turned themselves over to justice and the guillotine.

Perfect Cast.

Miss Webster, I suspect, realized that "Therese" has had many parallels in recent American criminology, including, especially, the Judd-Grey case, and she has made her players understand that they were not merely enacting a tragedy that occurred in the shadow of Notre Dame cathedral some 80 years ago but one that might occur today for delineation in tomorrow's newspapers. And to give the sordid story significance, she has seen to it that the actors have realized their obligation to play their parts, naturally and sympathetically, with all the implications of pity and terror which true tragedy must invoke in the audience.

For the work, Miss Webster has assembled a perfect cast—Dame May Witty, Victor Jory, Eva LeGallienne, Berry Kroeger, Doris Patson, John F. Hamilton, Averell Harris and Annette Sorell. Because Dame Witty (Miss Webster's 81 year old mother) has to dominate the entire play, enacting an entire scene with her eyes and without a word to say (because she is paralyzed, deaf and dumb in this scene) and, in earlier scenes has such a vigorous and commanding chore to perform, highest honors must go to her. She is so wonderful that tears of gratitude came into my eyes that I was privileged to see such art.

Other Splendid Playing.

I have never seen Miss LeGallienne give a more sincere and heartfelt performance. Md. Jory is such an adept technician in the art of melodrama that it would be almost patronizing to praise him. Suffice to say that he has a tough assignment in "Therese" and comes out with flying colors. My next bow must be to John F. Hamilton, the beloved Candy of "Of Mice and Men," who just about stole that show from the stars, Wally Ford and John Broderick; Mr. Hamilton, as a crotchety bachelor friend of the Raquins, enriches "Therese" with a fine characterization. And the others, all named above, have my thanks for contributing to a deeply satisfying evening in the theater.

If I may make a suggestion to Mr. Job and Miss Webster, it is that they should cut the comedy lines which provoke laughter in two places. The lines are amusing, but laughter is as inimical to the mood of "Therese" as it would have been to "Angel Street."

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NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 10, 1945

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Workmanlike

A VENERABLE melodrama has been reconditioned with considerable cunning in "Therese." Trained technicians are responsible for the new offering at the Biltmore. Thomas Job, in his adaptation of Emile Zola's "Therese Raquin," has kept the work in period, without relegating it to a msueum. The gifted Margaret Webster has staged it with great subtlety, and Raymond Sovey has invested it with all the fancy appointments that are commonly associated with gas-lit violence. Above all, it has Dame May Whitty giving a penetrating portrayal of an old lady who turns up a couple of murderers, even though she is paralyzed.

* * *

Her performance makes this contemporary version of a theatrical antique something more than a clever and entertaining stunt. No matter what convultions the plot takes in relating dark deeds, remorse and confession, she towers through the production with all the serenity she might have had in playing a great classic or modern tragedy. She quickens every scene of "Therese" with dramatic overtones which are not always discernible in the script. She actually contrives to make one or two scenes of this Victor Payne-Jennings and Bernard Klawans production moving, as well as remotely exciting.

* * *

"Therese" is well served by its players. In addition to the brilliant acting of Dame May Whitty, it boasts solid performances by Eva Le Gallienne, Victor Jory and the others in the cast. Miss Le Gallienne is particularly good as the daughter-in-law of the title character, who plots ner husband's murder and lives to regret it to such an extent ha she welcomes the guillotine. The vibrancy of her voice belies the frequently trite aspects of construction and dialogue which are probably inherent in the theme. Her handling of the final scenes is done with a conviction that is as satisfying as it is surprising.

Jory has a tendency to stress the more lurid melodramatic qualities of a work which has plenty of them in it. Whenhe is bemoaning the fact that he always paints the face of the man he killed, he is a touch on the ridiculous side. For all of that, he supports his colleagues with circumspect authority. Doris Patston Annette Sorell and Averell Harris contribute workwanlike bits. Workmanlike is the word for "Therese." One might wish that so much talent had been expended on something fresher and of more substance, but the show is very constantly entertaining and flares up with something more than mere Punch and Judy nonsense when Dame May Whitty has a hand in the proceedings.

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The New York Times

OCTOBER 10, 1945

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Zola's "Therese Raquin" set up her bonnet and ribbon shop at the Biltmore last evening, this time minus her surname and with an adaptation by Thomas Job. Despite the presence in the household of some players who can be very good at this type of thing, "Therese" provides a most sedate and conversational melodrama. Murder with its psychological aftermaths, its police inspectors and its burning and glaring eyes, requires more force and power than Mr. Job, this time, has been able to give it. And more than even Dame May Whitty, Eva LeGallienne and Victor Jory can bring to the important parts. "Therese" on this occasion keeps promising good theatrical excitement, but she fails to produce the goods. As in her own shop, probably no one was taking care of the orders and accounts.

* * *

"Therese" is old-fashioned and leisurely. It has very little action and must rely on the delineation of character to carry it on its way. Since Mr. Job runs quickly through his quiver of events and people, he must fill out the evening with conversation. For every moment of good melodramatic value, tossed like a fish to a hungry seal, he has many more of plain, aimless talk. In directing, Margaret Webster has tried to cover up some of the weaknesses of an evening that is being stretched too long, but her remedy on occasion appears to make some of the scenes even longer. Passages of love and remorse alike seem interminable. "Therese" just isn't a two-hour evening; it grows as thin as a piece of tissue paper, and about as fragile.

There is, of course, the slavey in the Requin household who has been elevated to mistress through her marriage to the son of the family. Into her life comes a painter and the desire to do away with her husband, an event which is accomplished during an afternoon on the river. The latter part of the play shows the effect of the murder on the painter and Therese, who cannot forget what they have done, and shows how the police inspector finally meets up with them. There are one or two striking scenes—the mother hearing of her son's death is good acting and good theatre—but there are not enough of them to hold up the whole.

* * *

The honors are Dame May's—and not due to nepotism on the part of Miss Webster, who is her daughter. Her picture of the old lady is a very human one, carefully drawn and expressed; it is honest even when some of the script plays against it. Miss LeGallienne is Therese. She is better as the Raquin household begins to run down hill than she is in the more romantic passages before it starts. Mr. Jory is the painter, amiable at the beginning but a good deal of a hair-tearer toward the end. Berry Kroeger plays the luckless Camille, making him the type of figure Therese might well wish to push into the stream. There are four extraneous characters—police inspector, old friend, society woman girl—used mainly by Mr. Job to fill pages in his book and by Miss Webster to fill the stage. As the girl, Annette Sorell is attractive; as the inspector, Averell Harris is traditional.

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 10, 1945

May Whitty Scores in 'Therese,' A Psychological Murder Drama

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Unless one has read the original novel, "Therese Raquin" (which I haven't), one might figure from the dope sheet that "Therese" would be arty. Directress, Margaret Shakespeare Webster; in the cast, Eva "Cherry Orchard" Le Gallienne and Britain's distinguished gift to the cinema, Dame May Whitty; original author, Emile "J'Accuse" Zola.

But, as it unhurriedly revealed itself at the Biltmore Theatre last night, "Therese" turned out to be a melodrama—a melodrama of murder and remorse, with two haunted killers going mad and an old lady, paralyzed except for her eyes, glaring them toward their doom.

It is good, this melodrama. Upon occasion the actors raise their voices, but the play seldom does. It employs no clutching hands, no corpses in closets, no screams in the dark, as it goes quietly about its business of telling about Therese Raquin, her husband Camille, her mother-in-law and her artist lover. It is set in the Paris of 1875, but it makes no annoying attempts at being excessively Gallic.

A Fake Accident.

Camille, the husband, should have been murdered, of course, for he was a milliner, a prig and a complainer, and not nearly as interesting as the family boarder, an artist. So Therese and the artist fake an accident on a Sunday outing in a canoe and come back home to tell the old lady her son is gone.

She accepts the story, and is pleased when, after a year, Therese and the artist marry. But the wedding makes no honeymoon for the guilty lovers—for the dead Camille is forever between them. Everything—every turn of conversation—leads to Camille, and with shortened tempers they begin mutual recriminations.

The old lady overhears—and the shock of realizing that her son was murdered makes of her a paralytic, unable to talk, able to move only her eyes. A little silly, maybe? So what? Many a fictioneer of any age has got by with more arbitrary maneuverings . . . and "Therese" has the inestimable luck of having 80-year-old Dame May Whitty playing the part. There, friends, is a trouper—gallant, wise, on to every trick of a canny trade, and so perfectly, perfectly sure of herself.

A Wow Finish.

Well, the old lady gets even, and the way she does it is fictioneering at its most obviously melodramatic.

Thomas Job has adapted the Zola story in slick fashion, and Miss Webster's company is very good. Miss Le Gallienne's transformation from an ardent husband-cheater to a conscience-tortured murderess is subtle; Jory's parallel transformation is hysterical and therefore interesting by contrast, and Berry Kroeger, as the husband, is properly obnoxious. Minor characters are nicely played by John F. Hamilton, Averell Harris, Doris Patston and an attractive newcomer, Annette Sorell.

Raymond Sovey's upstairs French living room set is just ugly enough to be right—both for a French living room and for a psychological murder yarn.

New York Post

OCTOBER 10, 1945

'Therese' an Old-Fashioned Thriller Minus the Thrills

By Wilella Waldorf

Thomas Job, whose "Uncle Harry" was a murder melodrama of more than passing interest, has gone back to Emile Zola's novel, "Therese Raquin," for his latest excursion into the theatre. We are not familiar with the book, but Mr. Job's stage version, "Therese," produced last night at the Biltmore, is a shockingly artificial play that sometimes becomes pure travesty, despite the fact that it is apparently meant to be an extremely serious work.

The story concerns the Raquins who live over the family millinery shop in the Pont Neuf District of Paris circa 1875. Camille Raquin, a conceited hypochondriac foolishly pampered by his doting mother, is married to Therese, an orphaned girl brought up by Madame Raquin as a sort of upper servant, and since her marriage to the son, regarded as his personal nurse.

But Therese has fallen in love with Laurent, a penniless artist, and he with her. They murder Camille one day during a boating trip on the river and look forward to a long dreamed-of happiness together. But the shadow of their crime hangs over them until finally old Madame Raquin, aware of their guilt but doomed to sit dumbly paralyzed in a wheel chair, succeeds in taking her revenge.

It is a story that could be shatteringly effective in the hands of a skilled novelist, but as Mr. Job tells it on the stage, it is musty melodrama with all of the faults and none of the kick of a good old-fashioned thriller. "Therese" is painfully dull going, so clumsily developed and so obviously contrived that it is hard to imagine why Margaret Webster ever took it upon herself to direct the piece, or how Eva LeGallienne, Dame May Whitty and Victor Jory decided to act in it.

But direct it Miss Webster has, for the most part obviously and artificially, to fit the script. Probably the only way to act "Therese" is to overact it, and just about everybody in the cast does so much of the time, though Miss LeGallienne and Mr. Jory have the biggest "scenes" and are therefore a bit ahead of the rest of the company in this respect. Miss Webster's mother, Dame May Whitty, has one or two good moments as old Madame Raquin, but the entire company is at a disadvantage throughout the evening, though the ingenue Annette Sorell indicates future possibilities.

Miss LeGallienne, who managed to be pretty impressive as the vengeful sister in "Uncle Harry," is distressingly miscast in "Therese." Not once did she suggest to us the character Mr. Job—and presumably Zola—had in mind. Mr. Jory and most of the actors, in fact, often seemed embarrassed by the lines they had to speak, or perhaps it was simply that we were acutely embarrassed for them, especially for Doris Patston when she had to get off a deplorable attempt at humor concerning the double bed versus the single bed.

PM

OCTOBER 10, 1945

Kronenberger

Murder Turns Out Pretty Dull

PM Reviews

The theater, last night, had its first go of the season at one of its liveliest subjects — murder. But the present exhibit fails to be very lively. Adapted by Thomas Job from a novel of Zola's, *Therese* seems a quite old-fashioned study of the effect of their crime on the murderers; a too slow-moving and garrulous melodrama that equally lack emotional thrills and psychological fascination.

Therese Raquin, deeply in love with a young painter, is chained by marriage to a stuffy fool. She persuades her lover to help her get rid of the husband; the three go boating on the Seine, and Raquin is "drowned" convincingly enough for no one, not even the mother who adores him, to be suspicious. But the lovers, though able now to marry, are unable to find happiness; guilt seizes them, and remorse. Eventually the old mother finds out the truth, but the shock of it paralyzes her; and while the guilty pair quarrel and the painter starts going to pieces, the old lady sits speechless and motionless in a wheel chair, awaiting her moment. Needless to say, it comes.

• • •

That *Therese* makes use of a classic theme and a pretty familiar plot is certainly nothing against it. Mr. Job had, indeed, all the materials for sound melodrama and even for a serious tragedy of character. But, though he has tried a little for both, he has managed to achieve neither. In terms of tragedy, his guilty couple are never for a moment vividly enough characterized or sharply enough probed. They are stock figures, displaying stock emotions; they are not even psychologically interesting. Hence one is thrown back upon plot interest and theatrical effect; and that, too, is nowhere vivid enough. Even as creatures of melodrama, the guilty pair fail to hold us; all that their commonplace emotionalizing does is to slow down a story that lacks movement at best. And it *is* slowed down much more by a number of talkative minor characters who are not at all interesting in themselves and not at all crucial to the plot; who seem, indeed, mere padding.

The whole thing, I'm afraid, has a tame, old-fashioned quality about it, and the production does little to bring it to life. Margaret Webster's direction is probably careful enough; but Eva LeGallienne, as Therese, lacks the passion and inner force implicit in the part; and as her partner in crime Victor Jory over-acts without ever finding the proper melodramatic style to overact in. Dame May Whitty is considerably better as the old mother, but she too fails to create a genuine character; and none of the smaller parts get anything like the expert performances they need to be effective.

—Louis Kronenberger

Journal-American

OCTOBER 10, 1945

'Therese' Presented At Biltmore Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

The exhibit at the Biltmore is a vehicle. Now a "vehicle," says Webster—Noah not Margaret—is "a container for the conveyance of bulky objects from one place to another." Well, the theatrical container which parked itself last night in W. 47th st. certainly must have conveyed Eva LeGallienne, Victor Jory and May Whitty from where they were to where they are against its better judgment.

Not that "Therese" isn't all right—as a vehicle! Cooked-up by Thomas Job, from the novel by Emile Zola, with its preposterous premise, its synthetic situations and its obvious denouncement, it gives its justly celebrated performers every opportunity to perform. And perform they do! Upstairs, downstairs in Raymond Sovey's setting, the actor, the actress and the Dame have themselves a fiesta.

But their customers don't. Not always! During two acts and twice that many scenes, there're long and languid stretches in which the painstaking plot is being conveyed awkwardly about the stage as the wheels of its conveyor creak painfully from the strain.

• • •

Like a Mother

You who have read "Therese Raquin," you who have seen it played in Germany, Poland, Spain, Italy, France, England and these United States during the past half-century, need not be told that the vehicle now at the Biltmore has to do with the rubbing-out of Camille, a be-trousered hat-trimmer whose shop adorns the Pont Nuef District of the Paris of 1875. He's like a mother to his millinery, Camille.

It's his wife who puts the finger on him. His wife, Therese, encouraged by her boy-friend, Laurent, and the majority of the audience. So, across from "Anna Lucasta" and a stone's throw from "Marinka," the male Mlle. Modiste disappears from view quite early in the evening. This worries the majority of the audience not at all. But it worries Therese and Laurent. It worries

them good and ragged.

But it's old Madame Raquin who, when she learns about her son's murderous mistreatment, goes into the noblest number. It's she who indulges in a stroke, takes to a wheel-chair, and spends the rest of the evening giving dirty looks to daughter-in-law and boy-friend.

Mean Eyed Dame

This melodramatic tale of life and love, of jealousy and hate, is acted for more than it's worth by Eva LeGallienne, the actress; Victor Jory, the actor, and May Whitty, the Dame. In the title role, Miss LeGallienne projects Therese Raquin with an admirable determination to bring out the worst that's in her. In Nineteenth Century costumes, designed by Mr. Sovey, she belies her unbecoming characterization.

As Laurent, Therese's ardent assistant killer, Victor Jory is as believable as anyone could be in a part so unbelievable. What Therese sees in him is understandable. What he sees in Therese is one of Broadway's minon mysteries. May Whitty makes-believe with a mean eye as the voiceless mother of a lifeless offspring. As the season's most devastating dirty-looker, she has something on the eye-ball.

Berry Kroeger is, I imagine, purposefully obnoxious as the be-trousered hat-trimmer. Doris Patston, is an elegant Louise. And, while in the Biltmore, I can't make out whether Annette Sorell is being applauded because she's Paderewski's godchild or Zola's Suzanne...Skip it!

"Polonaise"

The New York Times

OCTOBER 8, 1945

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Marching in measured tread on the Alvin Saturday night, "Polonaise" turned out to be one of the year's largest musicals, but one with comparable faults. Its virtues—music mainly by Chopin and a stage crowded by handsome costumes—succeed chiefly in accentuating the negative. Like many of its colleagues, both big and small, "Polonaise" is mumbling with book trouble, the direction being such as to make the words more than a little foolish. The acting is studied rather than spirited, the dancing is athletic rather than imaginative. The show as a whole seems a little like an old-fashioned pageant put on by worthy people in commemoration of a local incident—but not put on along Broadway.

The commemoration is of the life of Kosciuszko, the Polish patriot and honorary citizen of this country. For the most part it deals with the years immediately following the general's return home from the American revolution. Kosciuszko was a good Jefferson ian Democrat, which the authors concede, but their attempts to mingle the cause of freedom with the equally pure cause of romantic love is not successful. Both emerge crestfallen and a bit beaten. Gottfried Reinhardt and Anthony Veiller, who set down the words, have written with two remarkably-heavy pens, avoiding humor but not always avoiding a note of unconscious parody.

No one is attacking Chopin this early in the season, and no one this morning will chase Bronislaw Kaper, who adapted and arranged the numbers and wrote a few of his own for the score of "Polonaise." Many familiar airs are there, in lively orchestrations by Don Walker but with rather undistinguished lyrics by John Latouche. Neither the surroundings nor most members of the cast do Chopin justice, however. Jan Kiepura has a good voice, but is one of the most wooden actors imaginable; he completely lacks an ease of manner and the stage charm of a romantic hero. He sings as though he were in a concert hall, not in a Broadway show. Marta Eggerth, as a peasant girl in love with Kosciuszko, is considerably better. She has an agreeable delivery and in addition seems to be having a good time—and is trying to give everyone else one.

The dances are by David Lichine, with Tania Riabouchinska as the chief performer. There is far too much of the latter during the evening, and the former's contributions are pretty much of a piece. An item called "Battle Ballet," set to Chopin's Four Etudes and with a background of bright red lights, could be taken for parody under other circumstances. It cries for Fanny Brice to come on with her old "Rewolt!" Of the other members of the company, Rose Inghram has a song or so, and on opening night it was she who halted the show with "The Next Time I Care." This, by the way, is by Kaper, not Chopin. Curt Bois has the heavy task of being the comedian in a dull show, a defeat before he can start. Howard Bay's settings are nice and, as noted before, the costumes by Mary Grant are colorful and good.

A combination of the life of Kosciuszko and the songs of Chopin could make a stirring musical play. But old-fashioned and heavy-handed, "Polonaise" has not remained in tune with its idea.

'POLONAISE.'

Musical play by Gottfried Reinhardt and Anthony Veiller; music by Frederic Chopin; adaptations and original numbers by Bronislaw Kaper; lyrics by John LaTouche; choreography by David Lichine; book directed by Stella Adler; settings by Howard Bay; costumes by Mary Grant; orchestrations by Don Walker; musical director, Max Goberman; presented by W. Horace Schmidlapp, in association with Harry Bloomfield, at the Alvin Theater, Saturday, October 6, 1945. The cast:

Capt. Adams	John V. Schmidt
Gen. Washington	Josef Draper
Col. Hale	Martin Lewis
Gen. Thaddeus Kosciuszko	Jan Kiepura
Sgt. Wacek Zapolski	Curt Bois
Pvt. Tompkins	Sidney Lawson
Pvt. Skinner	Arthur Lincoln
Pvt. Motherwell	Martin Cooke
Mariska	Marta Eggerth
Wladek	Rem Olmsted
Tecia	Tania Riabouchinska
Gen. Boris Volkoff	Harry Bannister
Count Casimir Zaleski	Josef Draper
Poniatowski	Lewis Appleton
Kollontaj	Andrew Thurston
Potocki	Gary Green
Countess Ludwika Zaleski	Rose Inghram
Blacksmith	Martin Cooke
Butcher	Larry Beck
Priest	Larry O'Dell
Pianist	Vadal Skolovsky
King Stanislaus Augustus	James MacColl
Count Gronski	Walter Appler
Princess Margarita	Candy Jones
Princess Lydia	Lota Mauree
Princess Lania	Sherry Shadburne
Princess Anne Martha	Emma Watson
Peasant Girl	Betty Durrence
The Princess	Ruth Rickman
The Prince	Shaws O'Brien
The Highwayman	Seryel Ismaeloff
The Page	Amalia Valez
The Ballerina	Jean Harris, Virginia Barnes, Adele Bedrosky, Joan Collanette

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 8, 1945

By HOWARD BARNES

Kosciusko and Chopin

THE stage stumbled ponderously at the Alvin Saturday night. "Polonaise," which is vaguely described as a new musical, brings Kosciusko and Chopin into an uneasy liaison. Both of those celebrated Poles have every right to be doing handsprings in their respective graves. For the story of the show is unkempt and tedious, while the interpolated Chopin melodies which accompany vocalists and dancers are kicked around until they are scarcely recognizable. Bronislaw Kaper has tried to join his talents with those of the great composer, and there is one number called "Hay, Hay, Hay," which no one seems to want to take credit for. All in all "Polonaise" finds operetta at a singularly low ebb.

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The dancing is the chief distinction of the work. Under David Lichine's supervision, there are several ballets which deserve favorable attention, particularly when Tania Riabouchinska is executing a mazurka, or a pantomime called "Moonlight Soliloquy," founded fugitively on Chopin's Nocturne in F Sharp Major. Unfortunately, the climax of the soft shoe routines is rather ridiculously pretentious, as the Battle of Macijowice is interpreted to the music of four etudes. In any case, no amount of fleet footwork would have sufficed to save the production from the constant pall which hangs over it.

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The particular stars of the offering are Jan Kiepura and his wife, Marta Eggerth. They deliver their duets and solo numbers, as though they were appearing in grand opera rather than a new musical. They enact the tiny plot of the libretto in the same fashion. Since it is almost impossible to distinguish what language they are singing and talking in, it might have been smart to have had "Polonaise" an opera in Polish rather than a supposed theatrical entertainment.

Rose Inghram contributes a brief respite in wearisome proceedings. Her singing of "The Next Time I Care" brought down the house at the opening, without benefit of a claque. Curt Bois does what he can to make bad lines and preposterous business amusing; Harry Bannister stalks around as a sinister Russian general, and Josef Draper has the dubious privilege of playing George Washington in a couple of fleeting scenes. Gottfried Reinhardt and Anthony Veiller are responsible for the book. John Latouche has perpetrated the lyrics. And Howard Bay has designed stunning settings which deserve a great deal better than that which transpires in "Polonaise."

The Sun

OCTOBER 8, 1945

'Polonaise,' Disjointed and Humorless, Provides an Evening of Kiepura.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"Polonaise" is a solemn, stodgy and disjointed musical play. A great deal of money has been spent on a project that provides an evening of Jan Kiepura, of the operatic voice and still less than facile as an actor. He is hardly the man to carry a show. The new production opened Saturday evening at the Alvin.

W. Horace Schmidlapp, sportsman and Princeton alumnus, presents "Polonaise" in association with Harry Bloomfield. On the credit side, they offer some pleasant Chopin music, a gingery and hard-working and brightly costumed dancing ensemble, and good singing from Kiepura, Marta Eggerth and Rose Inghram.

But in considering the shortcomings of "Polonaise" the book is routine and lifeless, the dialogue portions and musical numbers are badly integrated, there is quite too much ballet, and comedy is non-existent. The evening offers long stretches of unrelieved tedium.

Now take Kiepura. He brings the fullness of his vocal power and his somewhat exasperating ways as an actor to the role of the Polish soldier and patriot, Gen. Kosciusko (given varying pronunciations by the cast), who aided the American colonies in their war for independence and who returned to his native land to lead Poland in its fight for freedom as a democracy. Kiepura, when singing, puts something of grand opera in a Broadway theater, but he has not advanced as an actor since his "Merry Widow" experience. In responding to an ovation he still comes to the very edge of the stage and stands there, holding the picture, in utterly transfixed delight.

Marta Eggerth, as the Polish heroine, Marisha, is more graceful in her bows, sings nicely and is rather easy with dialogue. She does a lot with and for a song, "I Wonder as I Wander." She and Kiepura get real feeling into "Just for Tonight," from Chopin's Etude in E. Curt Bois, playing the Sergeant to the heroic Kosciusko, struggles with some dismal comedy material. Harry Bannister, once of "Life With Father," turns up as Gen. Volkoff, but I prefer him in Lindsay & Crouse. Tania Riabouchinska and Rem Olmsted are agile and beautiful dancers. It's Rose Inghram, however, who was yanked last season out of "Up in Central Park" a few days before its opening, who stops the show, singing "The Next Time I Care." And in so doing she provided one of the evening's curious interludes.

The audience stormed for an encore. But she hesitated. The demand became more insistent. Miss Inghram flushed, smiled, looked at the audience, looked offstage, smiled again helplessly, took another look offstage. Apparently flagged from the wings, and quite flustered by now, she disappeared. There was no encore.

The humorless book for "Polonaise" was written by Gottfried Reinhardt and Anthony Veiller. Bronislaw Kaper, besides arranging and adapting the music of Chopin, wrote some of his own. Stella Adler, summoned by out-of-town emergency, is credited with staging the book. The elaborate settings are by the industrious Howard Bay and the excellent costumes by Mary Grant.

W. Horace Schmidlapp, this department's duck-blind companion on occasion (and perhaps he will be again), has put untold thousands into "Polonaise," but it comes forth as a spiritless and cumbersome production. The theatrical season is still looking for a good musical play.

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 8, 1945

Jan Is the Kiepura of the Keys And Spotlight, Too, in 'Polonaise'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

When Marta Eggerth and Jan Kiepura are singing Chopin's melodies, "Polonaise" is all right for an operetta. When David Lichine's dancers and all but one of his ballets are on the stage, it is very good. But when Mr. Kiepura is pretending that he is Thaddeus Andrzeg Bonawentura Kosciusko, the Polish patriot, it is acutely tiresome. And when Curt Bois is trying to be funny it is downright dreadful, for Mr. Bois has been stuck with what may be the longest and most unfunny comedy number in music-show history.

As a show, then, "Polonaise" is a disappointment, and for its strength must rely upon the already demonstrated drawing-power of its two stars. Yet there are not a few items on its credit side—the music, of course, and some of the lyrics made for it by John Latouche; the generous production purchased by producers Schmidlapp and Bloomfield, with handsome sets by Howard Bay and gay costumes by Mary Grant; the presence of Rose Inghram in the role of the Other Woman.

History Handled Well.

"Polonaise" is history, yet the plot authors, Gottfried Reinhardt and Anthony Veiller, have not tried to ram it down one's throat, dates and all. It begins with General George Washington raising Kosciusko to the rank of brigadier general for his military and engineering aid in our War of the Revolution. From there on, except for an epilogue in Philadelphia, it tells of Kosciusko's wars for the liberty of Poland with Russia and Prussia.

The history books tell that the great Polish leader was not successful in love, for the father of the first girl he wanted to marry had him beaten up—after which he called quits; and the father of the second one just said "No" and that was enough. Nevertheless, the plotters of "Polonaise" have managed to make Mr. Kiepura's romance with Miss Eggerth romantic enough without doing any great harm to fact. She is a peasant girl, and a wicked countess (Miss Inghram) tries to take him away from her. Fat chance.

Miss Eggerth is lovely, sings well and with warmth. Mr. Kiepura can sing like a man possessed, and I don't know of any other tenor with a first-class voice who would attempt what he is doing, eight performances a week.

But he just can't act. He poses. He gets up on wagons so he will be higher than anybody else. He makes entrances; at his first entrance, George Washington and some of the army are waiting for him at West Point, and at his second, a whole damn Polish revolution has to take place before he can come in. His favorite spot is in the middle of the stage at the edge of the apron, and there must be some kind of mark there for him so he won't fall off. For all the duets, the program bills him ahead of Miss Eggerth.

Girl Singer Stops Show.

Being so greatly blessed with all of these qualities, Mr. K. has an audience—or did have, at the very least, at the premiere Saturday in the Alvin Theatre. People would start yawping "Bravo!" before he stopped singing. But Miss Inghram stopped the show, too, with an interpolated song by Bronislaw Kaper titled "The Next Time I Care."

In most folk operettas—you know: where the peasants assemble in the old town platz in their dirndls and kalamazoo suspenders—every dancer tries to look as deft as a hummingbird but is obviously chiefly preoccupied with wondering how he can keep out of the way of the clumsy lug behind. In "Polonaise" Mr. Lichine has devised some enchanting numbers in which everybody operates like watchworks. The dancers, including Rem Olmsted, Ruth Riekman, Shawn O'Brien, Sergei Ismaeloff and Tatiana Riabouchinska, are splendid. Best number is a collection of mazurkas, in the best of Mr. Bay's sets.

The music, by Poland's Frederic Chopin, is above recommendation at this date. His melodies, waltzes, nocturnes, mazurkas, etudes, polonaises and bravura pieces are generously represented, well orchestrated and have words fitted to them. The Fantaisie Impromptu, which became "I'm Alway Chasing Rainbows" when Tin Pan Alley first heard it, now is called "I Wonder As I Wander"—and is appealingly and sweetly sung by Miss Eggerth.

PM

OCTOBER 8, 1945

—*Kronenberger*—

More Trouble For the Poles

PM Reviews

Broadway is packing so much history into its musicals this season, and so much histrionics as well, that perhaps it would be unfair to ask for a measure of gaiety or wit or style. At the Alvin Saturday night arrived a recklessly lavish creation called *Polonaise*, and the best I can say for the thing as a whole is that it appalled me enough at times to keep me from being bored. The show has simply spared no expense to gum itself up in every possible way. It conceivably could have been a pleasant period musical with lovely music, and a not-too-bad account of an interesting chapter in Poland's history. Instead, it hops off almost at once from Poland to Ruritania, and from there to a place compared to which Ruritania is stark realism.

To be sure, there was at the very outset something faintly odd about harnessing the music of a 19th-century composer to the career of an 18th-century patriot, simply because both of them were Poles. But let that pass; historical miscegenation is the least of musical comedy's crimes; and, anyhow, it isn't Chopin who throws a monkey-wrench into Kosciusko's exploits. Chopin's waltzes and mazurkas and nocturnes, crudely schmaltzed up for singing purposes though they are, remain much the most attractive thing in the show. As for General Thaddeus Kosciusko, he is shown returning to Poland (after fighting valorously in our own Revolutionary War) to lead an unsuccessful people's uprising. If this is any proper account of it, it's hard to see how it could have succeeded. Kosciusko himself, as played by Jan Kiepura, seems carved out of wood. He mouths a few pet little speeches about freedom as mechanically as a parrot. As for the revolution itself, it is turned into the sort of lurid carnival that the Roxy, in the days of its most purple stage spectacles, would have sniffed at.

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The King of Poland, for example, wanders about a luridly lighted palace seeing great menacing shadows on the wall and haunting spectres through the windows. Later, there is a "Battle Ballet" of Mr. Lichine's contriving, with the stage swimming in crimson light, a tall figure leaping madly about, and a large flag borne in and out until—as the curtain falls—it is being wig-wagged from the top of a sort of small hill.

The rustic doings of the peasants, the royal doings of the Court, the romantic doings of Mr. Kiepura and Miss Eggerth are scarcely more polished if somewhat less violent; and the humorous doings are perhaps the worst of all. There are, to speak truth, a few pleasant interruptions to all this mish-mash. Mr. Kiepura and Miss Eggerth sing a lot of Chopin, sometimes rather well. Mr. Lichine has an occasional nice moment of choreography, and Tania Riabouchinska an occasional nice moment of dancing. And one or two, at least, of Howard Bay's sets are very good. But the evening as a whole is quite deplorable.

—Louis Kronenberger.

New York Post

OCTOBER 8, 1945

'Polonaise' an Operetta So Bad It Burlesques Itself

By Wilella Waldorf

It is about time somebody started a League for the Defense of Dead Composers. Frederic Chopin died nearly a hundred years ago, but his music still lives. Surely the modern theatre owes a decent respect to his memory and his melodies. It is disturbing that some of his finest works, "adapted" for the occasion, should be carelessly flaunted on the Broadway stage in a futile attempt to add luster to a stupid, inept, often embarrassingly ludicrous spectacle entitled "Polonaise" which opened at the Alvin last Saturday night.

The producers of "Polonaise" have not even the doubtful excuse of trying to put on one of those "Blossom Time" style operettas in which the composer himself is the hero of the piece and proceeds to play, and sing, his own works throughout the evening.

"Polonaise," to be sure, is a biographical operetta, but not about Chopin. It endeavors to celebrate the exploits both in this country and his own, of Thaddeus Kosciusko, the Polish patriot who, like the French LaFayette, gave timely aid to the forces of General Washington during the American Revolution.

Let us hope no impressionable school children (if there are any such left in this sophisticated age) wander into the Alvin during the run of "Polonaise"—for we are informed by trade experts that it is sure to have a run, being the happy possessor of a fancy advance sale at the box office. No history book, however eloquent, will ever quite erase from their tender memories the stage picture here presented of some of the great figures who fought our War for Independence, including not only Kosciusko but General Washington himself.

Caricature of Kosciusko

Kosciusko was a Pole and presumably Jan Kiepura, who is also a Pole, means to do him honor by impersonating him in "Polonaise." But Mr. Kiepura, endowed by nature with a fine tenor voice which he misuses abominably, is an exhibitionist whose stage deportment sometimes seems almost pathologically *mal a propos*. Definitely no actor, Mr. Kiepura nevertheless exudes a spurious emotion while singing that, combined with a set of puppet-show gestures in the worst operatic tradition, results in a more devastating caricature of a pompous *tenore robusto* than any satiric impressionist could ever hope to achieve.

Marta Eggerth, co-starred with her husband, is an appealing blond peasant girl when she manages to forget that stage smile, and her facility in pianissimo passages always makes us try to overlook the shrillness and metallic quality of so much of her singing.

The text of this unfortunate excursion into Polish and American history, is so unskilled, and its "comedy" interludes so tasteless, that one could only be grateful to the majority of the actors for rendering much of it unintelligible. An Austrian comedian, Curt Bois, burdened with debilitating material, mercifully swallowed many of his lines before they could escape across the footlights, but even allowing for his shabby treatment by the authors, he struck us as one of the unfunniest funnymen we have ever encountered.

Battle of the Ballets

Acting as his stooge was, of all people, Tania (once Tatiana) Riabouchinska, the Russian ballerina whose place is on her toes, not trying to speak dialogue—at any rate, not this dialogue. David Lichine's ballet numbers were only intermittently effective, and there was an overcrowed, clumsy atmosphere about many of the crowd effects that rendered the two "big scenes" in the play less impressive than they should have been.

Kosciusko's army storming the Royal Palace at Warsaw and the subsequent Battle of Macijowice were both interpreted by the ballet with Howard Bay's majestic settings gorily flooded in red light. If this sort of thing isn't superlatively done, it is apt to seem rather silly. Mr. Lichine couldn't quite pull it off last Saturday.

The Chopin musical adaptations are used chiefly for the ballet and to supply Mr. Kiepura with melodious songs, while the adaptor, Bronislaw Kaper, composed music of a forgettable nature for the ladies, Miss Eggerth and Rose Inghram.

John La Touche's lyrics remained a well kept secret most of the evening, for many of the performers were equipped with formidable accents and the stage was nearly always hip-deep in broken English. When someone like the personable Miss Inghram, who might be expected to make herself clear, turned up as the Countess Zaleski, she merely confused us further by constantly referring to "We aristocrats," then beginning one of her songs: "Long ago I usta know a soljer."

Zadel Skolovsky, the concert pianist hired to play Chopin's Polonaise in A Flat while the ballet stormed the Royal Palace, not only performed with vigor at the pianoforte but spoke his one line of dialogue clearly and as if he knew what it meant. Maybe what "Polonaise" needs is a few concert pianists in some of the other roles.